

## Mini-dorms raise ire of neighbors

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The Eidemillers moved to College View Estates for its closeness to San Diego State University and family-friendly feel.

The neighborhood was clean, quiet and safe. Residents were young families like them.

That was 50 years ago. These days, their neighbors include college students crammed into homes built for the average-sized family and their streets are cluttered with empty beer bottles, food wrappers and other party debris on weekends.

"They might as well put up apartments here," said Roberta Eidemiller, who lives on Hewlett Drive. "Our quality of life isn't what it should be."

With the new school year under way, residents in neighborhoods around colleges are again putting up with loud parties, cars parked on lawns and trashed streets. They blame what they call mini-dorms, which have brought the college lifestyle into their once-quiet family neighborhoods.

Mini-dorms are single-family homes rented to multiple college students. The homes are often modified – such as a garage converted into a bedroom – to fit as many people as possible, and sometimes the yard is paved for parking.

"It's become a real blight on a single-family neighborhood," said San Diego City Councilman Jim Madaffer, whose district includes the College Area surrounding SDSU. "Because they are college students, and God love them, they party."

Madaffer is hosting a town forum tomorrow to discuss the problem and options for the city. It is scheduled for 7 p.m. at College Avenue Baptist Church, 4747 College Ave.

Madaffer also plans to have a workshop on mini-dorms at the City Council's Land Use and Housing Committee meeting Sept. 27.

“Whatever we are doing now doesn't work,” he said.

San Diego's options may be limited. The city cannot regulate the number of people living in a single-family house, said Sheri Carr, the city's deputy director of Neighborhood Code Compliance.

The city had, until 1986, only allowed no more than three unrelated people in one home. But, Carr said, a California Supreme Court ruling ended that regulation.

The city had two ordinances, which attempted to limit the number of people living in a single-family home. Those regulations were repealed in a successful lawsuit in 1993 by the College Area Renters and Landlords Association.

The city does have regulations concerning parking in certain areas, including near colleges. If a single-family home has more than five bedrooms, there must be one parking space for each bedroom, Carr said.

And, if an owner decides to convert a garage or modify the home by adding bedrooms, Carr said, the work requires a building permit.

Madaffer said the majority of the mini-dorms are around colleges, but single-family homes are being converted in neighborhoods such as San Carlos, Allied Gardens and Del Cerro.

He doesn't have any numbers, and not all mini-dorms cause problems, he said. But “one mini-dorm can ruin an entire neighborhood.”

Anne Brunkow, president of the Del Cerro Action Council, said she's heard of only one mini-dorm in her community.

In College View Estates, just west of SDSU, Madaffer said, 70 of 340 homes are rentals. And the latest survey showed that 40 had been converted to mini-dorms.

“It's not the students moving in, it's what they do,” said Rosary Nepi, the president of the College View Estates Association.

Nepi, a College View Estates resident for almost five decades, said in the last few years, more mini-dorms have popped up in the neighborhood. People have sold and left San Diego, and opportunistic absentee landlords are pouncing on the homes.

“It's starting to get overwhelming,” she said.

A lack of student housing has contributed to the problem. SDSU expected a record 34,500 students this semester. The school has plans to expand to about 45,000 students by 2025.

Madaffer said there are programs to help residents cope with living near college students or people who continually cause disturbances.

Under the Safe Streets Now program, residents can file lawsuits in small claims court against owners of homes that have caused problems in the neighborhood. Madaffer also has used federal Community Development Block Grant money to pay for a consultant to work with the residents.

Under the College Area Party Plan, which was created in in the late 1980s, police can crack down on problem homes. Under the plan, a home and its occupants can be designated or “capped” for a variety of offenses, such as if police respond to two or more party disturbance calls within 60 days. If the police return within one year to a house that has been “capped,” the occupants can be arrested, said Capt. Guy Swanger, who heads the Mid-City Police Division.

There are 70 designated houses in the College Area, he said. The program seems to deter repeat offences.

“The kids don't want to get arrested,” he said.

Eidemiller said neighbors keep each other informed about parties and houses turned into mini-dorms.

“When you see things happen, news gets out fast,” she said.

One of the neighborhood's biggest fears, she said, is when a for sale sign is posted.

Connie Zuniga, who has lived in the College Area since 1990, said she doesn't blame people for buying homes and renting to college students. After all, it's not illegal to fill the house with as many tenants as possible and turn a profit.

She just wishes some students would be a little more respectful. She doesn't appreciate the excessive swearing and the noise from all-night parties.

Zuniga spent \$6,000 to install double-pane windows this summer. But she still gets awakened by the noise. And, she added, she's hard of hearing.

“It's going to be a bad year,” she said. “We already know it.”

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